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THE
Nature and Necessity of Self-Denial:

A
S E R M O N

Preached at the
PARISH CHURCH
OF
St. *ANDREW*, *Holborn*,
ON
SUNDAY, October 9. 1737.

By GEORGE WHITEFIELD, A. B.
of PEMBROKE College, Oxford.

Published at the Request of several who heard it.

The SECOND EDITION.

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MDCCXXXVIII.

THE
NATURE AND NECESSITY OF SELF-DENIAL:

A
SERMON

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PARISH CHURCH

OF

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MDCCLXXXVII.

LUKE ix. 23.

And he said unto them all, If any Man will come after me, let him deny himself.

WHOEVER reads the Gospel with a single Eye, and sincere Intention, will find that our Blessed Lord took all Opportunities of reminding his Disciples that his Kingdom was not of this World; that *his* Doctrine was a Doctrine of the Cross; and that their professing themselves to be his Followers would call them to a constant State of voluntary or Self-suffering and Self-denial.

THE Words of the Text affords us one Instance, among many, of our Saviour's Behaviour in this Matter: For having in the preceding Verses revealed himself to *Peter*, and the other Apostles, to be *The CHRIST of GOD*; lest they should be too much elated
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2 *The Nature and Necessity*

with such a peculiar Discovery of his Deity, or think that their Relation to so great a Personage would be attended with nothing but Pomp and Grandeur, he tells them, in the 22^d Verse, that the Son of Man was to suffer many Things in this World, though He was to be crowned with eternal Glory and Honour in the next: And that if any of them or their Posterity would share in the same Honour, they must bear a Part with him in his Self-denial, and Sufferings, *For He said unto them all, If any Man will come after me let him deny himself.*

FROM which Words I shall consider these *three Things*:

- I. *First*, The Nature of the Self-denial recommended in the Text; and in how many Respects we must deny ourselves, in order to come after JESUS CHRIST.
- II. *Secondly*, I shall endeavour to prove the Universality and Reasonableness of this Duty of Self-denial.

Thirdly,

Thirdly and lastly, I shall offer some Considerations, which may serve as so many Motives to reconcile us to, and quicken us in the Practice of this Doctrine of Self-denial.

AND *First*, then, I am to shew the Nature of the Self-denial recommended in the Text; or in how many respects we must deny ourselves, in order to follow JESUS CHRIST.

Now as the Faculties of the Soul are distinguished by the Understanding, Will, and Affections; so in all these must each of us deny himself. We must not *lean to our own Understanding*, being *wise in our own Eyes*, and *prudent in our own Sight*, but we must submit our short-sighted Reason to the Light of Divine Revelation; for there are Mysteries in Religion, which are above, though not contrary to, our natural Reason: And therefore we shall never become Christians unless we cast down *Imaginations*, and every high Thing that exalteth itself against the Knowledge of God, and bring into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ. It is in

4 *The Nature and Necessity*

this respect, as well as others, that we must *become Fools for Christ's Sake*, and acknowledge we know nothing without Revelation, as we ought to know. We must then, with all Humility and Reverence, embrace the mysterious Truths revealed to us *in the Holy Scriptures*; for thus only can we become truly Wise, even *Wise unto Salvation*. It was Matter of our Blessed Lord's Thanksgiving to his heavenly Father, that he had *hid these Things from the Wise and Prudent, and had revealed them unto Babes*. And in this respect also we must *be converted and become as little Children*, teachable, and willing to follow the Lamb into whatsoever Mysteries he shall be pleased to lead us; and believe and practise all divine Truths, not because we can demonstrate them, but because God, *who cannot lie*, has revealed them to us.

HENCE then we may trace Infidelity to its Fountain Head; for it is nothing else but a Pride of the Understanding, an Unwillingness to submit to the *Truth of God*, that makes so many, professing themselves Wise, to become such Fools as to deny *the Lord who* has so
dearly

dearly *bought them*; and dispute the Divinity of that Eternal Word, *in whom they live, and move and have their Being*: Whereby, 'tis justly to be feared, they will bring upon themselves sure, if not swift, Destruction.

BUT to return: As we must deny ourselves in our Understandings, so must we deny, or, as it might be more properly rendered, renounce our Wills: that is, we must make our own Wills no Principle of Action, but *whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we must do all*, not merely to please ourselves, *but to the Glory of God*. Not that we are therefore to imagine we are to have no Pleasure in any Thing we do, (*Wisdom's Ways are Ways of Pleasantness*) but pleasing ourselves must not be the principal, but only the subordinate End of our Actions.

AND I cannot but particularly press this Doctrine upon you, because it is the Grand Secret of our Holy Religion. It is this, my Brethren, that distinguishes the true Christian from the mere Moralist and formal Professor; and which alone can render any of our Acti-
ons

6 *The Nature and Necessity*

ons acceptable in GOD's Sight: For *if thine Eye be single*, says our Blessed Lord, *Matth. vi. 22.* that is, If thou aimest simply to please GOD, without any regard to thy own Will, *thy whole Body*, that is, all thy Actions, *will be full of Light*; agreeable to the Gospel, which is called *Light*: But *if thine Eye be evil*, if thine Intention be diverted any other Way, *thy whole Body*, all thy Actions, *will be full of Darkness*, unprofitable, and capable of no Reward. For we must not only do the Will of GOD, but do it *because* it is his Will; since we pray that GOD's *Will may be done on Earth as it is in Heaven*. And, no doubt, the blessed Angels not only do every Thing that GOD willeth, but do it chearfully, out of this Principle, because GOD willeth it: And if we would live as we pray, we must *go and do likewise*.

BUT farther; as we must renounce our own Wills in *doing*, so likewise must we renounce them in *suffering* the Will of GOD. Whatsoever befalls us, we must say with good old *Eli*, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good*; or with one that was infinitely greater

greater than *Eli, Father, not my Will, but thine be done.* "O JESU, thine was an innocent Will, and yet Thou renouncedst it: "Teach us, even us also, O our Saviour! to "submit our Wills to thine in all *the Evils* "which shall be *brought upon us*; and in every thing enable us to give Thanks, since it "is thy blessed Will concerning us!

THIRDLY and lastly, we must deny ourselves, as in our Understandings and Wills, so likewise in our Affections. More particularly we must deny ourselves the pleasurable Indulgence and Self-enjoyment of Riches: *If any Man will come after me, says our Blessed Lord, he must forsake all and follow me.* And again (to shew the utter Inconsistency of the Love of the Things of this World with the Love of the Father) he tells us, that *unless a Man forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my Disciple.*

FAR be it from me to think that these Texts are to be taken in a literal Sense, as though they obliged rich Persons to go sell all that they have, and give to the Poor (for that would

8 *The Nature and Necessity*

would put it out of their Power to be serviceable to the Poor for the future) but however they certainly imply thus much, That we are to sit loose to, sell, and forsake all in Affection, and be willing to part with every Thing, when GOD shall require it at our Hands: That is, as the Apostle observes, we must *use the World as though we used it not*; and though we are *in the World*, we must not be *of it*. We must look upon ourselves as Stewards and not Proprietors of the manifold Gifts of GOD; provide first what is necessary for ourselves and for our Households, and expend the rest, not in Indulgences and superfluous Ornaments, forbidden by the Apostle, but in clothing, feeding, and relieving the naked, hungry, distressed Disciples of JESUS CHRIST. This is what our Blessed Lord would have us understand by forsaking all, and in this Sense must each of us deny himself.

I am sensible that this will seem *an hard Saying* to many, who will be offended because they are covetous, and *Lovers of Pleasure more than Lovers of God*: But if I yet pleased such Men, *I should not be the Servant of Christ.*

Christ. No, we must not, like *Abab's* false Prophets, have a *lying Spirit in our Mouths*, nor fail to *declare* (with *St. Paul*) *the Whole Will of GOD*; and, like honest *Micajah*, out of Pity and Compassion, tell Men the Truth, though they may falsely think *we prophecy not Good, but Evil concerning them*.

BUT to proceed: As we must renounce our Affection for Riches, so likewise our Affections for our Relations, when they stand in opposition to our Love of, and Duty to GOD: For thus saith the Saviour of the World: *If any Man will come after me, and hateth not his Father and Mother, his Children and Brethren and Sisters, yea and his own Life also, he cannot be my Disciple.* — Strange Doctrine this! What, hate our own Flesh? What, hate the Father that begat us, the Mother that bare us! *How can these Things be?* Can GOD contradict himself? Has he not bid us Honour our Father and Mother? And yet we are here commanded to hate them. How must these Truths be reconciled? Why, by interpreting the Word *hate*, not in a rigorous and absolute Sense, but *comparatively*:

10 *The Nature and Necessity*

tively: not as implying a total Alienation, but a less Degree of Affection. For thus our Blessed Saviour himself, (the best and surest Expofitor of his own Meaning) explains it in a parallel Text, Matth. x. 37. He that loveth Father or Mother more than me, is not worthy of me: He that loveth Son or Daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. So that when the Perfuaſions of ſuch our Friends (as for our Trial they may be permitted to be) are contrary to the Will of GOD, we muſt ſay with Levi, we have not known them; or, agreeably to our Bleſſed Lord's Rebuke to Peter, Get you behind me, my Adverſaries; for you favour not the Things that be of GOD, but the Things that be of Men.

To conclude this Head: We muſt deny ourſelves in Things indifferent: For it might eaſily be ſhewn that as many, if not more, periſh by an immoderate Uſe of Things in themſelves indifferent as by any groſs Sin whatever. A prudent Chriſtian therefore will conſider not only what is *lawful*, but what is *expedient* alſo: not ſo much what Degrees of Self-denial beſt ſuit his Inclinations here, as
what

what will most effectually break his Will, and fit him for greater Degrees of Glory hereafter.

BUT is this the Doctrine of Christianity? and is not the Christian World then asleep? If not, whence the Self-indulgence, whence the reigning Love of Riches which we every where meet with? Above all, whence that predominant Greediness or sensual Pleasure, that has so over-run this sinful Nation, that, was a pious Stranger to come amongst us, he would be tempted to think some Heathen *Venus* was worshipped here, and that Temples were dedicated to her Service. But we have the Authority of an inspired Apostle to affirm that they who live in *such a Round of Pleasure are dead while they live*: Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, *Awake thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee Light*. But the Power of raising the spiritually Dead belongeth only unto GOD. “ Do Thou therefore, O Holy JESUS, who by thy almighty Word commandedst *Lazarus* to come forth, though he had lain in the Grave *so many Days*, speak also as effectually to these

12 *The Nature and Necessity*

“ spiritually dead Souls, whom *Satan* for these
“ many Years has so fast bound by sensual
“ Pleasures, that they are not so much as
“ able to lift up their Eyes or Hearts to
“ Heaven.”

II. BUT I pass on to the *Second* general Thing proposed: *viz.* to consider the universal Obligation, and Reasonableness of this Doctrine of Self-denial,

WHEN our Blessed Master had been discoursing publickly concerning the Watchfulness of the *faithful and wise Steward*, his Disciples asked him, *Speakest thou this Parable to all, or only to us?* The same Question I am aware has been, and will be, put concerning the foregoing Doctrine: for too many, unwilling to take CHRIST's easy Yoke upon them, in order to evade the Force of the Gospel Precepts, would pretend that all those Commands concerning Self-denial, renouncing ourselves and the World, belonged only to our Lord's first and immediate Followers, and not *to us or to our Children*. But such Persons greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures,

tures, nor the Power of Godliness in their Hearts. For the Doctrine of JESUS CHRIST, like his blessed Self, is *the same Yesterday, To-day, and for ever*. What he said unto *one*, he said unto *all*, even unto the Ends of the World; *If any Man will come after me, let him deny himself*: And in the Text it is particularly mentioned that *He said unto them all*. And lest we should still absurdly imagine, that this Word *all* was to be confined to his Apostles, with whom he was then discoursing, it is said in another Place, that JESUS turned unto the Multitude and said, *If any Man will come after me, and hateth not his Father and Mother, yea and his own Life also, he cannot be my Disciple*. “When
“our Blessed Lord had spoken a certain Pa-
“rable, it is said, the Scribes and Pharisees
“were offended, for they knew the Parable
“was spoken against them; And if Christi-
“ans can now read these plain and positive
“Texts of Scripture, and at the same Time
“not think they are spoken of them, they
“are more hardened than *Jews*, and more in-
“sincere than Pharisees.*

* LAW's *Christian Perfection*.

14 *The Nature and Necessity*

IN the former Part of this Discourse I observed that the Precepts concerning forsaking and selling all did not oblige us in a literal Sense, because the State of the Church does not demand it of us, as it did of the Primitive Christians; but still the same Deadness to the World, the same abstemious Use of, and Readiness to part with our Goods for CHRIST's Sake, is as absolutely necessary for, and as obligatory on us, as it was on them. For though the Church may differ as to the outward State of it, in different Ages, yet as to the Purity of its inward State, it was, is, and always will be invariably the same. And all the Commands which we meet with in the *Epistles*, about mortifying our Members which are upon the Earth, of setting our Affections on Things above, and of not being conformed to this World; are but so many incontestable Proofs that the same Holiness Heavenly-mindedness, and Deadness to the World, is as necessary for us as for our Lord's immediate Followers.

BUT farther, as such an Objection argues an Ignorance of the Scriptures, so it is a manifest

nifest Proof that such as make it are Strangers to the Power of Godliness *in their Hearts*. For since the Sum and Substance of Religion consists in our Recovery from our fallen Estate in *Adam*, by a New Birth in CHRIST JESUS, there is an absolute Necessity for us to embrace and practise the Self-denial before recommended. Because we have not only a new House to build, but an old one first to pull down; we must necessarily therefore be dead to the World, before we can *live unto GOD*. In short, all Things belonging to the *Old Man* must die in us, before the Things belonging to the *Spirit* can live and grow in us.

When JESUS CHRIST was *about* to make his publick Appearance, and to preach the glad Tidings of Salvation to a benighted World, his Harbinger *John Baptist* was sent *to prepare his Way before him*. In like manner, when this same JESUS is about to take Possession of a converted Sinner's Heart, *Self-denial*, like *John the Baptist*, must prepare the Way before him: For we must mourn before we are capable of being comforted; we must undergo the *Spirit of Bondage*, in order

16 *The Nature and Necessity*

order to be made meet to receive the *Spirit of Adoption*.

WERE we indeed in a State of Innocence, and had we, like *Adam* before his Fall, the Divine Image fully stamped upon our Souls, we then should have no need of Self-denial; but since we are fallen, sickly, disordered Creatures, and this Self-suffering, this Self-renunciation is the *indispensable Means* of *recovering* our Primitive Glory; methinks, in that Case, to endeavour to shake off and reject such a salutary Practice, on account of the Difficulty attending it at first, is but too like the Obstinacy of a perverse sick Child, who *nauseates* and *refuses* the Potion reached out to it by a skilful Physician or tender Parent, because it is a little ungrateful to the Taste.

HAD any of us seen *Lazarus* when he lay full of Sores at the Rich Man's Gate; or *Job*, when he was smitten with Ulcers from the Crown of his Head to the Sole of his Foot: And had we at the same Time prescribed to them some healing *Medicines*, which because
they

they would put them to Pain, they would not apply to their *Wounds*, should we not most justly think, that they were either fond of a distempered Body, or were not sensible of their Distempers? But our Souls, by Nature, are in an infinitely more deplorable Condition than the Bodies of *Job* or *Lazarus*, when full of Ulcers and Boils: For, alas! our *whole Head is sick*, and our *whole Heart faint*; from the *Crown of the Head to the sole of the Foot*, we are full of *Wounds and Bruises and putrifying Sores*, and there is no *Health in us*. And JESUS CHRIST, like a good Physician, in the Gospel Doctrine of Self-denial, presents us with a spiritual *Medicine to heal our Sickness*: but if we will neither receive nor apply it, 'tis a Sign we are not sensible of the *Wretchedness* of our State, or else that we are *unwilling to be made whole*.

EVEN *Naaman's* Servants could say, when he refused, *pursuant to Elisha's Orders*, to wash in the River *Jordan*, that he might cure his Leprosy, *Father*, if the *Profit* had bid thee do some great Thing, would'st thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he

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saith

18 *The Nature and Necessity*

Saith to thee, Wash and be clean? And may not I very properly address myself to you in the same Manner, my Brethren: If JESUS CHRIST, our Great Prophet, had bid you do some great and very difficult Thing, would you not have done it? much more then should you do it, when he only bids you deny yourselves what would certainly hurt you if enjoyed, and behold you shall be *made perfectly whole.*

BUT to illustrate this by another Comparison; in the 12th Chapter of the *Acts*, we read that Saint Peter was kept in Prison, and was sleeping between two Soldiers, bound with two Chains: And behold an Angel of the Lord came upon him, and smote Peter on the Side, saying, *Arise up quickly: And his Chains fell off from his Hands.* But had this great Apostle, instead of rising up quickly, and doing as the blessed Angel commanded him, hugg'd his Chains and begg'd that they might not be let fall from his Hands, would not any one think that he was in love with Slavery, and deserved to be *executed* next Morning? And does not the Person who refuses to deny himself, act as inconsistently as this Apostle would

would have done if he had neglected the Means of his Deliverance? for our Souls, by Nature, are in a spiritual Dungeon, sleeping and fast bound between the World, the Flesh and the Devil, not with Two, but Ten Thousand Chains of Lusts and Corruptions. Now JESUS CHRIST, like St. Peter's good Angel, by his Gospel comes and opens the Prison Door, prescribes Self-denial, Mortification, and Renunciation of ourselves and the World, as so many spiritual Keys which will unlock our *Shackles*, make them fall off from our Hearts, and so restore *us* to the *Glorious Liberty of the Sons of GOD*. But if we will not arise quickly, *Gird up the Loins of our Mind*, and deny ourselves, as he has commanded, are we not in love with Bondage and deserve never to be *delivered* from it?

INDEED I will not affirm that this Doctrine of Self-denial appears in this just Light to every one. No, I am sensible that to the *Natural Man* it is *Foolishness*; and to the *Young Convert* an *hard Saying*. But what says our Saviour? *If any Man will do my Will, he shall know of the Doctrine whether*

20 *The Nature and Necessity*

it be of GOD, or whether I speak of myself. This, my dear Friends, is the best, the only Way of Conviction: Let us up and be doing; Let us arise quickly and deny ourselves, and the Lord JESUS will remove those Scales from the Eyes of our Minds, which now like so many Veils hinders *us* from seeing clearly the Reasonableness, Necessity, and inexpressible Advantage of the Doctrine that has been now delivered. Let us but once thus *shew ourselves Men*, and then the *Spirit of GOD* will move on the Face of our Souls, as he did once upon the Face of the great Deep; and cause them to emerge out of that confused Chaos in which they are most certainly now involved, if we are Strangers and Enemies to *Self-denial* and *the Cross of Christ*.

BUT notwithstanding this Doctrine of *Self-denial* is, when rightly understood, so reasonable and beneficial; yet many, it is to be feared, like the young Man in the Gospel, are ready to go away sorrowful.

III. PROCEED we therefore now to the *Third* and *last* general Thing proposed; viz. To offer

offer some Considerations which may serve as so many Motives to reconcile us to, and *quicken us* in the Practice of this Duty of *Self-denial*.

1. And the *first* Means I shall recommend to you, in order to reconcile you to this Doctrine, is, to meditate frequently on the Life of our Blessed Lord and Master JESUS CHRIST. Oh! may we *often* think on Him our Grand Exemplar; follow him from his Cradle to his Cross, and see what a *self-denying Life* He led! And shall not we *drink of the Cup that he drank of; and be baptized with the Baptism that He was baptized with?* Or think we that JESUS CHRIST did and suffered every Thing in order to have us excused and exempted from Sufferings? No, far be it from any sincere Christian to judge after this manner! For St. Peter tells us, *He suffered for us, leaving us an Example that we should follow his Steps.* Had CHRIST, indeed, like *those that sat in Moses's Chair, laid heavy Burthens of Self-denial* upon us, (supposing they were heavy, which they are not,) and refused to *touch them himself with one of his Fingers; we*
might

22 *The Nature and Necessity*

might have had some Pretence to complain: but since he has enjoined us nothing, but what he has first put in Practice himself, *Thou art inexcusable*, O Disciple, *whoever thou art*, who would'st be above thy persecuted self-denying Master: And thou art no good and faithful Servant, who art unwilling to suffer and sympathize with thy mortified heavenly-minded Lord.

2. NEXT to the Pattern of our Blessed Master, think often on the Lives of the glorious Company of the *Apostles*, the goodly Fellowship of the *Prophets*, and the noble Army of *Martyrs*; who by a constant *looking to the Author and Finisher of our Faith*, have fought the good Fight, and are gone before us to inherit the Promises. View, again and again, how holily, how self-denyingly, how unblameably they lived: And if Self-denial was necessary for them, why not for us also? Are we not Men of like Passions *with them*? Do we not live in the same wicked World as they did? Have we not the same Good Spirit to assist, support, and purify us, as they had? And is not the same Eternal Inheritance reached

reached out, as a Reward of our Self-denial and Renunciation of the World, as was offered to them? and if we have the same Nature to change, the same wicked World to withstand, the same Good Spirit to help, and the same Eternal Crown to reward our Obedience; why should we not lead the same Lives as they did? Do we think They did Works of Supererogation? If not, why don't we do as they did? Or why does the Church set apart Festivals to commemorate the Deaths and Sufferings of the Saints, but in order to excite us *to follow them as they did Christ?*

3. THIRDLY, Think often on the Pains of Hell: consider whether it is not better to cut off a Right Hand or Foot, and pluck out a Right Eye, if they offend us (or cause us to sin) *rather than to be cast into Hell, into the Fire that never shall be quenched; where the Worm dieth not, and the Fire is not quenched.* Think how many Thousands there are now reserved, with damned Spirits, in Chains of Darknes unto the Judgment of the *Great Day*, for not complying with the Precept in the Text. And think withal that This, this
must

24 *The Nature and Necessity*

must be our own Case shortly, unless we are wise in time, and submit to those easy Conditions our Saviour has prescribed us, in order to avoid it. Think you they now imagine JESUS CHRIST to be an hard Master; or rather think you not they would give Ten thousand times ten thousand Worlds, could they but return to Life again, and take CHRIST's easy Yoke upon them? And can we dwell with everlasting Burnings more than they? No; if we cannot bear this Precept, *Come, deny yourselves, take up your Crosses,* How shall we bear that irrevocable Sentence, *Depart from me, ye Cursed, into everlasting Fire prepared for the Devil and his Angels?* But I hope those, amongst whom I am now preaching the Kingdom of GOD, are not so disingenuous as to need to be driven to their Duty by the Terrors of the LORD, but rather desire to be drawn by the Cords of Love.

LASTLY therefore, and to conclude, — often meditate on the Joys of Heaven: Think, think with what unspeakable Glory those happy Souls are now incircled, who when on
Earth

Earth were called to deny themselves as well as we, and were not disobedient to that Call: Lift up your Hearts frequently toward the Mansions of eternal Bliss, and with an Eye of Faith, like the great Saint *Stephen*, see the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man with his glorious Retinue of departed Saints sitting and solacing themselves in eternal Joys, and with unspeakable Comfort looking back on their past Sufferings and Self-denials, as so many glorious Means which exalted them to *such a Crown*. Hark! methinks I hear them chanting forth their everlasting *Hallelujahs*, and spending an eternal Day in echoing forth triumphant Songs of Joy. And do you not long, my Brethren, to join this heavenly Choir? Do not your Hearts burn within you? *As the Hart panteth after the Water Brooks*, do not your Souls *so long after the blessed Company of these Sons of God*? Behold then a heavenly Ladder reached down to you, by which you may climb to this Holy Hill. *If any Man will come after them, let him deny himself and follow them*. It was this, my Brethren, exalted the Holy JESUS
E himself,

26 *The Nature and Necessity, &c.*

himself, as Man, to sit at the Right Hand of his adorable Father. By this alone every Saint that ever lived, *ascended into the Joy of their Lord*: And by *this* we, even *we* also may be lifted up into the same most blisful Regions, there to enjoy an eternal Rest with the People of GOD, and join with them in singing *Doxologies* and *Songs of Praise*, to the Everlasting, Blessed, All-glorious, most Adorable Trinity, for ever and ever.

*Which GOD of his infinite Mercy grant,
&c.*

F I N I S.

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